



United States Environmental Protection Agency

Region 10 Emergency Response Unit

POLLUTION REPORT

I. HEADING

Date: July 26, 2001
Subject: Schnitzer Steel Fire, Tacoma, Washington
From: Jeffry Rodin OSC, USEPA, Region 10,
Emergency Response Unit
Tel: Office (206) 553-6709
TO: See Distribution

II. BACKGROUND

Site ID: SSID# 10ZZ
Delivery Order No: NA
Response Authority: CERCLA
CERCLIS No: NA
NPL Status: NA
State Notification: Washington Department of Ecology
Action Memo Status: NA
Removal Start Date: July 19, 2001
Expected Completion Date: July 21, 2001
Site Web Page: NA

III. SITE INFORMATION

A. Incident Category

Emergency Response Action.

B. Site Description

1. Site Location

The Schnitzer Steel facility is a metal salvaging and recycling facility located in the Tacoma Tideflats area of Tacoma, Washington. The site is located near or within the Commencement Bay Superfund site.

The Tacoma Tideflats area is an area of heavy industrial and commercial development. The closest businesses surrounding the facility include a marina, a barge loading company, and a restaurant/bar. Schnitzer Steel employs approximately 70 people. The nearest residences are located approximately 0.5 miles north of the facility.

2. Description of Threat

At approximately 1330 on Thursday, July 19, a fire began in a pile of scrapped automobiles. The facility reported that the total volume of material in the pile was 11,000 tons with approximately 80% of the material being metallic. The remaining 20% of the material was reported to be automobile seats, dashboards, upholstery, etc. At approximately 1500 hours, the USEPA was notified of the fire by a citizen's telephone call. The EPA responded immediately and at the time of EPA's arrival at approximately 1615, the entire pile was involved in the fire. The smoke plume was approximately 3 miles long and from ground level to a height of approximately 500 feet above the ground surface. The EPA's role in this incident was to provide on-site real-time air monitoring and to provide technical assistance to the Tacoma Fire Department, and Tacoma Emergency Management.

C. Assessment Results

No prior assessment was conducted at this site.

IV. Response Information

A. Situation

1. Initial Situation

July 19, 2001 (Thursday): At approximately 1500 hours, the USEPA was notified of the event by a citizen's telephone call. The EPA responded immediately and at the time of EPA's arrival at approximately 1615, the entire pile was involved in the fire. At the time of EPA's arrival, the Tacoma Fire Department (TFD) had been spraying water continuously, at a rate of approximately 20,000 gallons per minute, from several engines and ladder trucks. Two fire boats, and a crane were utilized to haul 7,000-gallon "buckets" of seawater from the bay to dump directly on the pile. An on-site water containment system, used for treatment of surface runoff, was quickly overwhelmed and the runoff began discharging directly into a boomed off area of the bay. Little to no sheen was observed from this runoff.

EPA's role in this incident was to provide on-site real-time air monitoring and to provide technical assistance to the TFD. Two PDR instruments were quickly set-up - one downwind and another upwind from the fire. These locations were based on information received from a Washington Department of Ecology wind modeling program. The PDRs were used to determine and record real-time dust and particulate concentrations in the air on a continuous basis. These PDRs were in

place at the closest business and residential area to the fire or within the plume. A sampling round was conducted approximately every 2 hours using a TVA 1000 FID/PID instrument to detect concentrations of volatile organic compounds, a MultiRae 412 for carbon monoxide and oxygen concentrations, and an electronic Dräger instrument for specific airborne chemicals (vinyl chloride, benzene, sulfur dioxide, hydrogen cyanide, and nitrogen dioxide). The sampling continued every two hours until 0200 hours the next day. At that time, the sampling results indicate only low levels of pollutants present below NIOSH time weighted averages (TWA) action levels.

July 20, 2001 (Friday): The TFD continued spraying water on the fire throughout the early morning. At 0700, the EPA conducted air monitoring near Pacific Highway. Only low concentration of particulate matter was detected with all other readings for contaminants at background levels. By 0800, no visible flames were noticed from the fire, although the pile continued to smolder. At 1500 hours, the TFD conducted a short test by applying no water to the smoldering area for a period of a half hour. The test failed as the fire flared back up. The TFD immediately began watering the fire again with plans to continue for several hours. At 1540, the EPA conducted air monitoring just outside the hot zone. Only low concentrations of particulate matter was detected with all other readings for contaminants at background levels.

The EPA OSC was available and requested for interviews by the press multiple times the night of July 19 and the morning of July 20.

July 21, 2001 (Saturday): At 0800, the EPA arrives on site and consults with the TFD Fire Chief for morning update. During the evening hours water delivery to the fire from the “bucket” and fire boats efforts ceased. Fire crews picked through debris with crane-mounted claws and were stationed at areas of concern. By morning, no additional watering was being conducted. The EPA conducted air monitoring in the hot zone. Only low concentrations of particulate matter was detected with all other readings for contaminants at background levels. The TFD stationed a watering vehicle for precautionary measure and demobilized some personnel. The EPA departs the site at 1235 hours.

B. Planned Removal Activities

All planned response activities have been completed.

C. Next Steps

There are no planned activities scheduled by EPA Emergency Response and Removal Program.

V. Cost Information

Estimated costs are summarized below

	Established Ceiling
EPA	
START	\$ 15,000
ERRS	NA
Total	

Note: The above accounting of expenditures is an estimate based on figures known to the OSC at the time this report was written. The cost accounting provided in this report does not necessarily represent an exact monetary figure which the government may include in any claim for cost recovery.

VI Distribution

To: EPA Headquarters, Washington, D.C. Attention: Terry Eby
 EPA Region 10, Emergency Response Unit, Attention: Chris Field
 EPA Washington Operations Office, Attention: Tom Eaton
 Puyallup Tribe of Indians, Tacoma, Attention: Joe Edgell
 Muckleshoot Tribe, Tacoma, Attention:
 Washington State Department of Ecology, Attention: Jim Sachet
 City of Tacoma Public Works Department, Attention: Michael Kennedy
 EPA Region 10 Web page, Attention: Beth Kunz
 EPA Region 10, Emergency Response Unit, Attention: OSCs